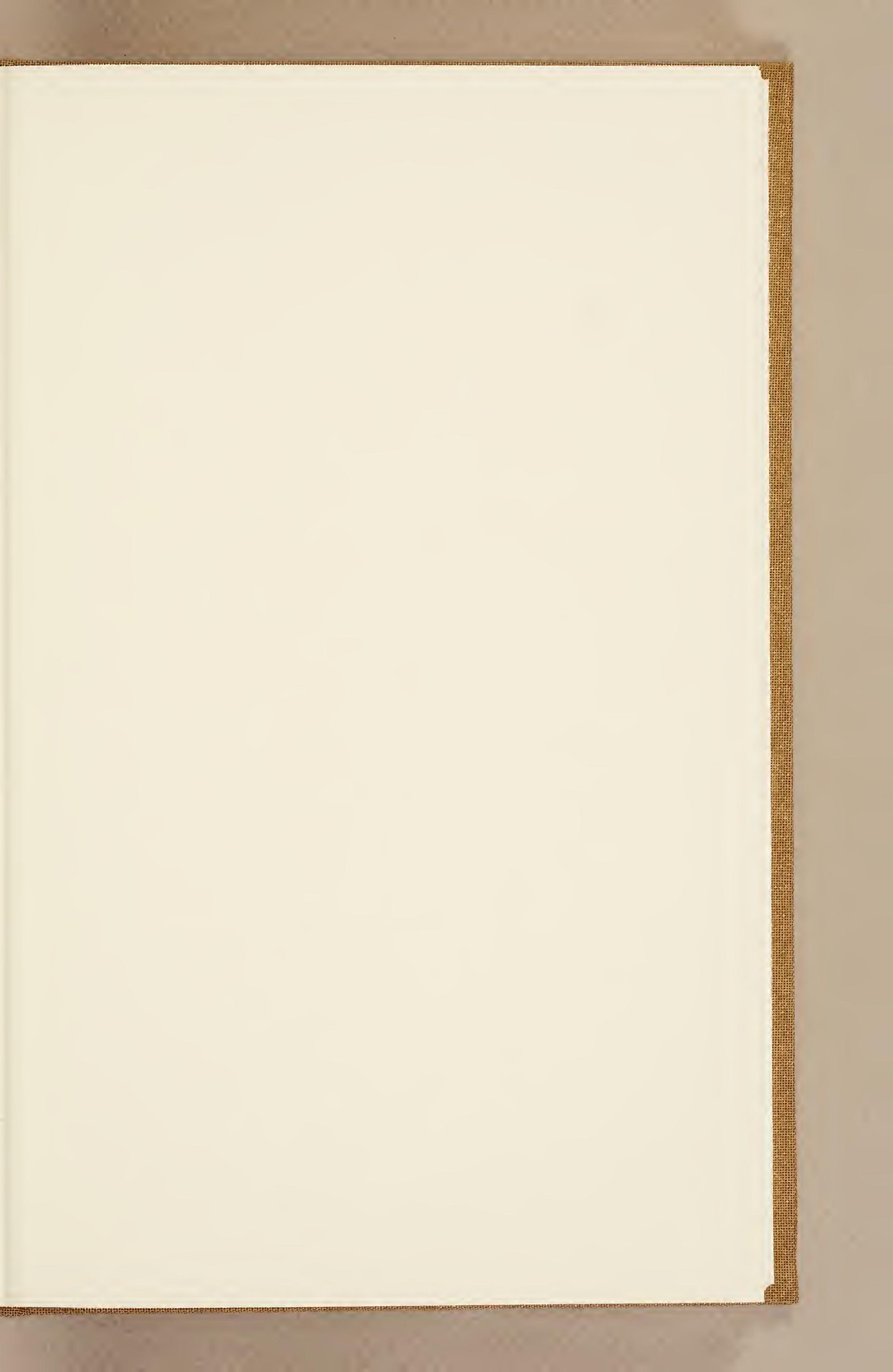
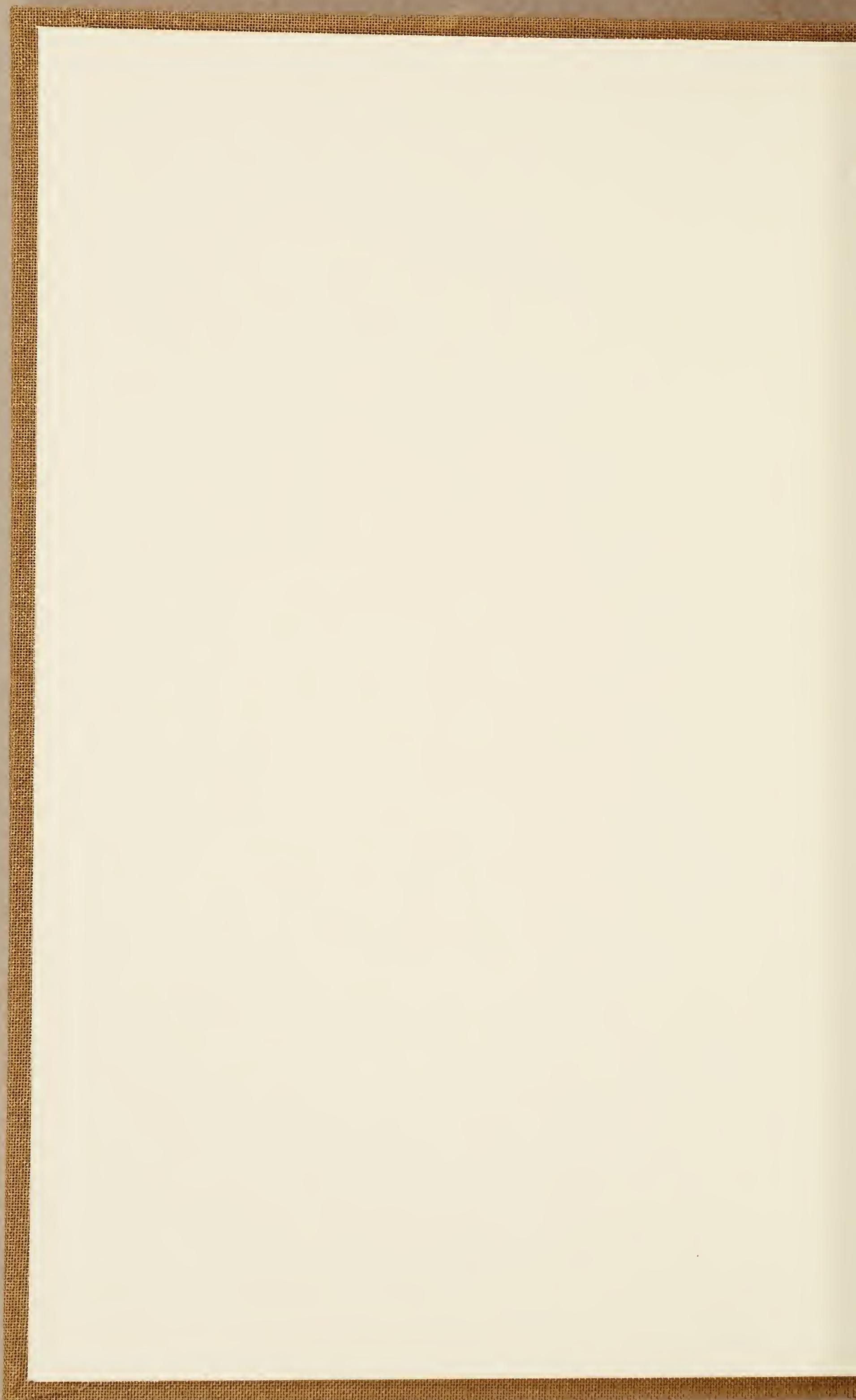
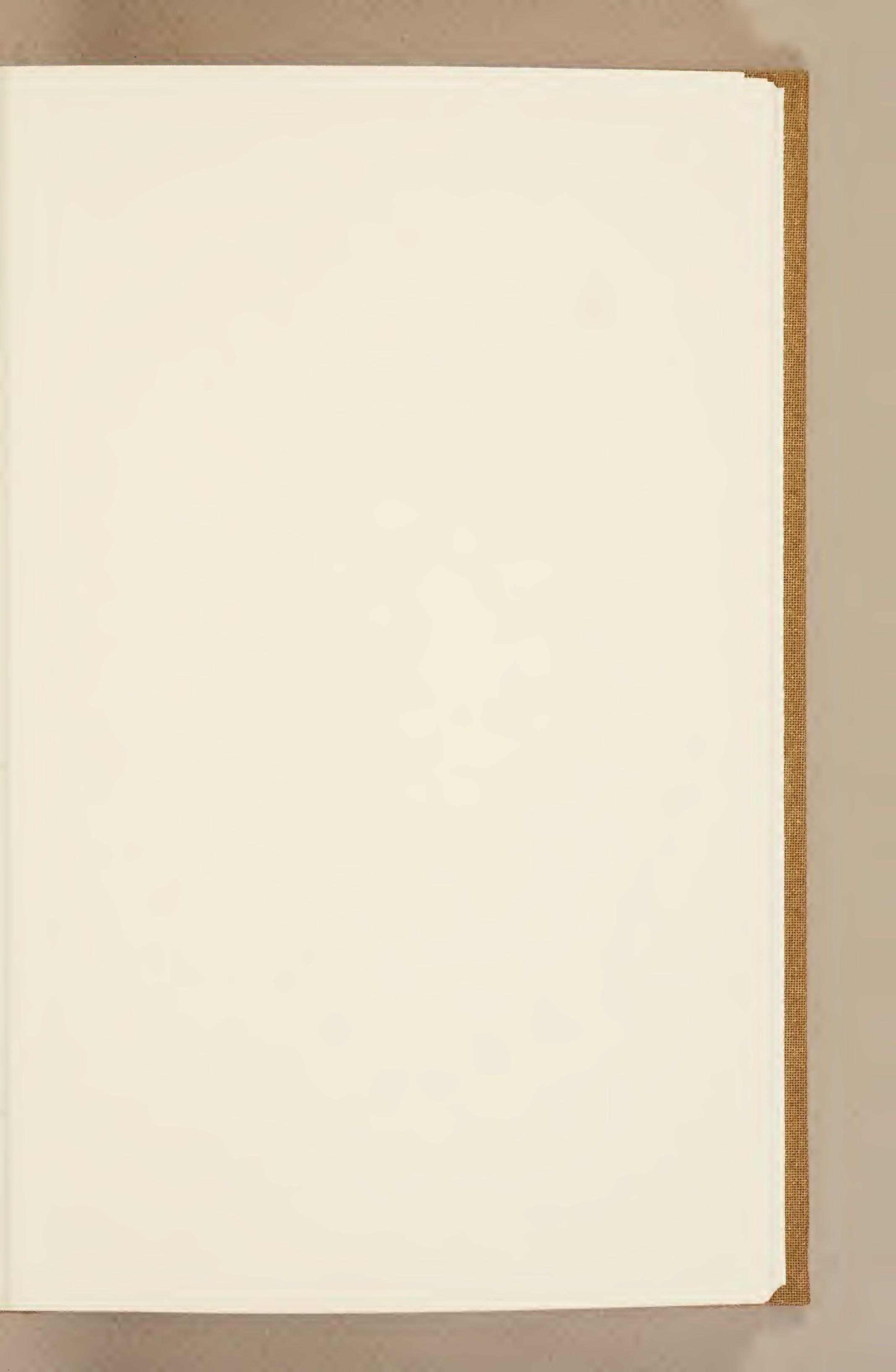


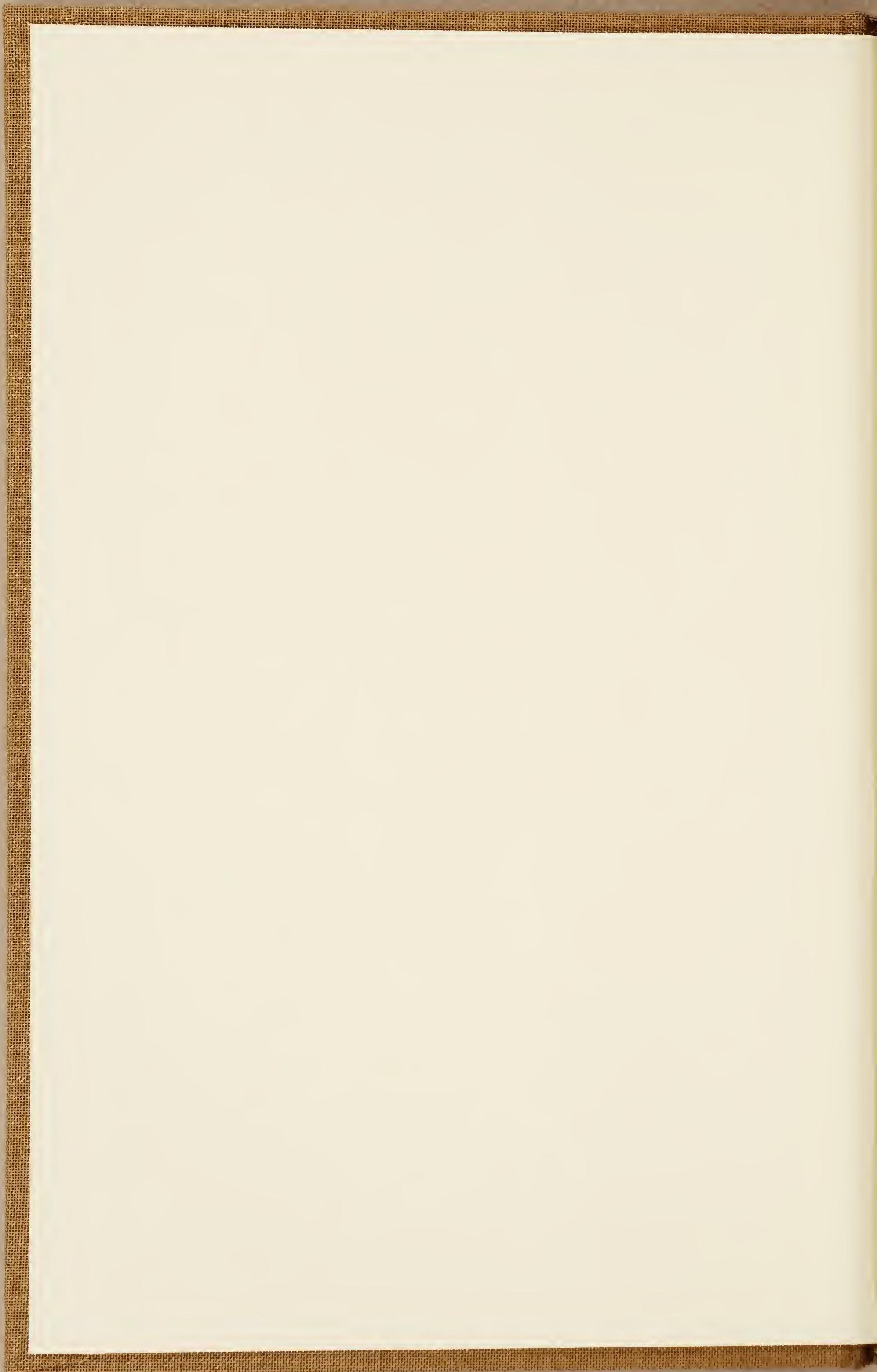
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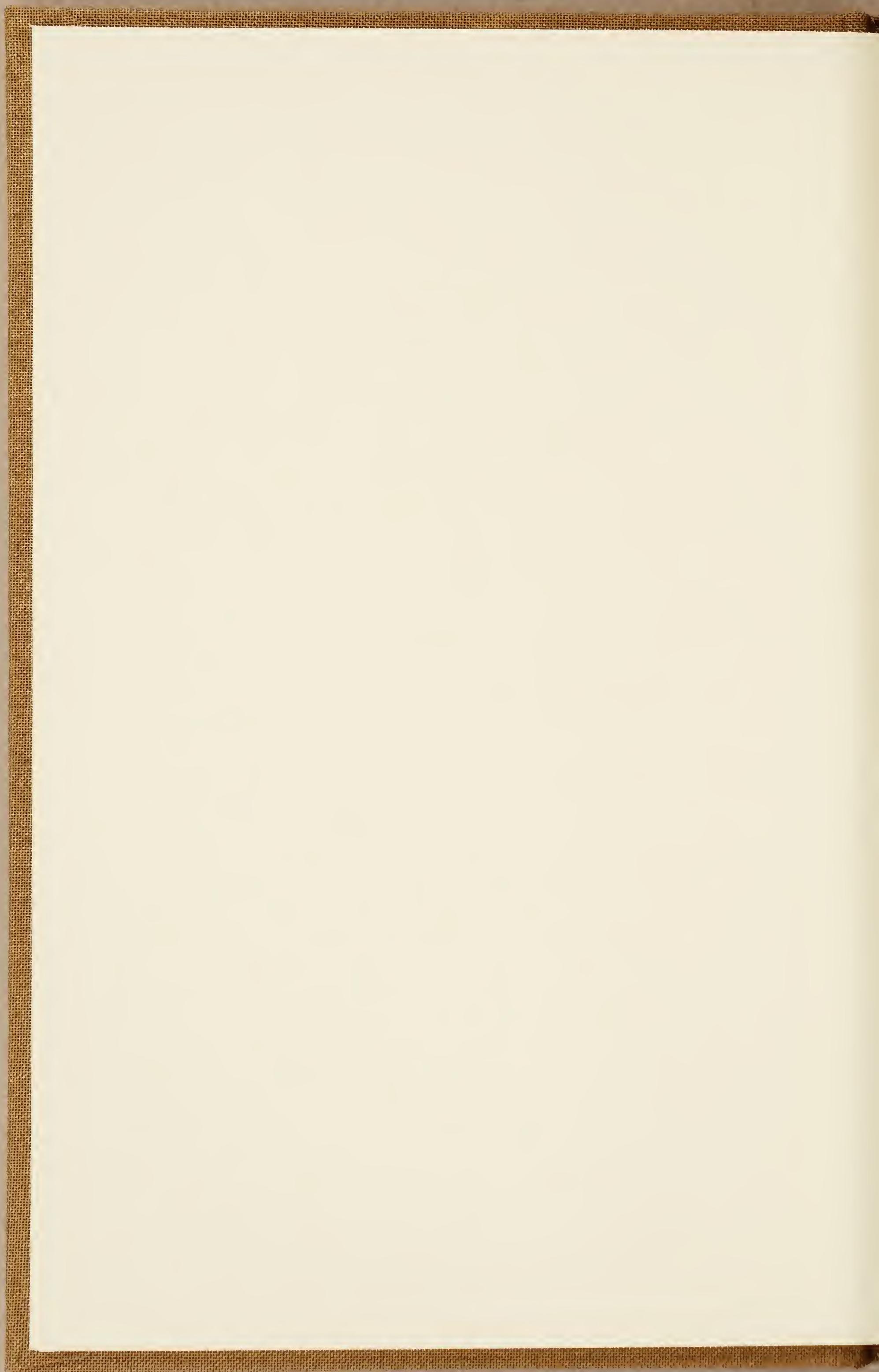








DO
THE AMERICAS
HAVE A COMMON
HISTORY?



Do the Americas Have a Common History ?

An Address

by J. H. Elliott

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF MODERN HISTORY
OXFORD UNIVERSITY

PRESENTED ON THE
OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE
150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
FOUNDING OF THE
JOHN CARTER BROWN LIBRARY
13 NOVEMBER 1996

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FOREWORD

“DO THE Americas Have a Common History?”

The question is existential in the sense that how we answer may contain the power to change the way we think and live. A common past implies a common future. A common past can be invoked to political effect, as it often is, either to join or to separate peoples. Yet historians of integrity are not politicians. Despite the tug of policy, which is often felt by the historian, he strives to tell the story as it really was.

Thus is the issue presented to Professor Elliott. Is humankind one or many? It is easy to reply: We are both one and many. The great Medieval Scholastic debate between realists and nominalists is perennial. In various disguises it will always be with us. It can always be said, without necessarily advancing the argument much: In some respects we are many and in others one. The trick of the philosopher, or in this case the historian, is to tell us to what degree and in what respects we are united or fragmented. A good response requires special refinement of judgment, deep acquaintance with the facts, a discerning mind. Professor Elliott is renowned for these qualities.

On the question at issue, the John Carter Brown Library may be said to have a bias, as Professor Elliott notes. The very existence of a research collection such as ours, concentrated on all of the Americas before ca. 1825

—Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, British, Amerindian, and African, were the major populations—suggests some belief in a unified story. Could Professor Elliott have risked demonstrating in this talk, presented on the occasion of our sesquicentennial celebration, that the JCB has in fact been disjointed all these years?

There was, however, little fear of that. If to claim “unity” is too great a leap of faith, the Library may be said to be premised on the idea that the *comparative* study of the Americas cannot fail to be illuminating, and in truth hardly a day passes at the JCB when, listening to diverse researchers talk about their work, we do not see that to be the case.

John H. Elliott made his reputation as a scholar writing in particular about Spain and its empire. With that as his background, he is now endeavoring to look at the Spanish empire and the British empire together. Who could be better qualified to do this, since he is a native Englishman, who has an instinctive “feel” for the history and culture of his own country, and yet has become a great master of Spanish history and culture. Moreover, it does not hurt that Professor Elliott spent nearly twenty years on the permanent faculty of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, a residency that has provided him as well with the insider perspective of an American.

In the present essay, we have the fruit of some of his early thinking about the challenge of looking at the Americas as a kind of unit, emphasizing in particular the Spanish and the British colonies but not neglecting alto-

gether even Portuguese Brazil and French Canada. The complex answer to the question may be, as Professor Elliott at one point suggests, that the Americas have not so much a common as an intertwined history, sometimes closer and sometimes farther apart. Such a history may be both real and indirect—indirect in the sense that what the peoples of the Americas have thought or imagined about the others in this space is as important an influence upon what happened as what they actually did.

Not long ago, the Mexican Ambassador to Canada delivered a lecture in the Library. Aside from new and rapidly expanding trade relations in the 1990s that have brought these two truly disparate countries closer to each other than they have ever been before, Mexico and Canada have discovered as part of their “common” history that they both have long borders with the United States.

Such observations, of course, are the stuff of twentieth-century history, which seemingly has little to do with the colonial period in which the John Carter Brown Library specializes. True enough, but to answer the questions of the present we are typically forced to turn to the past, and the logic of inquiry often leads us deeper and deeper into the past. The John Carter Brown Library may be said to be founded not on the *assertion*: “The Americas have a common history; here are the primary sources with which to prove it,” but on the *question*: “Do the Americas have a common history? Here are the primary sources with which to try to answer it”—a project that will take at least a few more centuries.

Professor Elliott’s address, delivered on November 13,

1996, was the penultimate event in a sesquicentennial celebration that had begun six weeks before and included conferences and symposia, receptions and dinners, concerts and lectures. The next day, November 14th, at a special Convocation called by Brown University, Professor Elliott was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters.

NORMAN FIERING

Director & Librarian

John Carter Brown Library

DO THE AMERICAS HAVE A COMMON HISTORY?

IT WAS seventy years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence that John Carter Brown began amassing the great library whose 150th anniversary we celebrate today. During those seventy years, the new republic had successfully launched itself on its career of manifest destiny, under the name, *faute de mieux*, of "The United States of America." Properly, the denomination "America" belonged to the entire hemisphere, as Jefferson recognized when he wrote to Alexander von Humboldt in 1813 that "America has a hemisphere to itself," a hemisphere with its own interests, distinct from those of Europe.¹ Yet although the Founding Fathers had successfully invented a state, inspiration failed them when it came to inventing a name. "The United States of America" it was to remain, once "Columbia" and "Freedonia" had fallen by the wayside.² This decision, or, rather, lack of decision, was to have unexpected consequences. By default, the inhabitants of the new republic arrogated to

1. As quoted in Arthur P. Whitaker, *The Western Hemisphere Idea: Its Rise and Decline* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1954), p. 29.

2. For the problem of nomenclature, see George R. Stewart, *Names on the Land. A Historical Account of Place-Naming in the United States* (New York, 1945, repr. 1954), ch. 19.

themselves the name of “Americans,” for what else could they be called? In the process, they deprived all the other peoples of the hemisphere of their collective name, and compelled the pluralization of “America” into “the Americas.”

A single “America” had, of course, always been no more than a notional entity, a name imposed by Europeans on a vast new world on which they had stumbled unawares. But in the age of the Enlightenment the colonial inhabitants of this new world themselves began to find attractions in the notion of a separate and shared American identity, as they sought to secure their place in the sun in the face of European domination and disparagement; and the concept of “America” survived the fragmentation of the hemisphere into independent republics, to remain, for some of them at least, an abiding image and inspiration.³ But the distances were too great, the disparities too marked, the dividing line too sharp. “There is no community of interests between North and South America,” John Quincy Adams observed in 1820,⁴ and even if the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was often to disprove this categorical assertion, the different societies of the Americas, although casting many glances at each other over their shoulders, were to go their separate ways.

3. See in particular Whitaker, *The Western Hemisphere Idea*, ch. 1. Also Harry Bernstein, “Some Inter-American Aspects of the Enlightenment,” in Arthur P. Whitaker, ed., *Latin America and the Enlightenment* (1942; 2nd. ed., Ithaca, N.Y., 1961), pp. 53–69.

4. Whitaker, *The Western Hemisphere Idea*, p. 35.

But if the image of “America” quickly dissolved into the reality of “the Americas,” one group at least helped to keep it alive. This was the confraternity of bibliophiles—Obadiah Rich, James Lenox, John Carter Brown—who, as they competed for the treasures of European libraries, took America in its widest sense for their bibliographical province.⁵ From Henry Harrisse’s *Bibliotheca Americana Vetustissima* and Joseph Sabin’s *Bibliotheca Americana*, the first of these published and the second announced in 1866, to John Alden’s and Dennis Landis’s splendid *European Americana*, whose compilation represents one of the greatest of the many services rendered by the John Carter Brown Library to the world of scholarship, the grand tradition has been sustained. If we pose the question which has given this lecture its title—“Do the Americas have a common history?”—we must begin by recognizing that the whole rationale of the John Carter Brown Library is based on the postulate that they do.

As one who has spent many pleasant and profitable hours working among its treasures, and has received a generous invitation to lecture in celebration of its 150th anniversary, it would, you will appreciate, be rather embarrassing for me to have to answer the question in the negative. Fortunately, you will be relieved to hear, this will not be necessary. But, as with all questions, we need to know why it comes to be asked, and what exactly it means.

5. Lewis Hanke, ed., *Do the Americas Have a Common History? A Critique of the Bolton Thesis* (New York, 1964), p. 7.

The question “Do the Americas have a common history?” seems first to have been posed in this form of words in 1941, when it was chosen as the title for the English translation of an essay originally published in Spanish in 1939 by Edmundo O’Gorman on “Hegel and Modern Pan-Americanism.”⁶ But it was left to that great evangelist for Latin American history, Lewis Hanke, to pick up the question and give it general currency by selecting it in 1964 as the title for a volume in his series of Borzoi Books on Latin America. Sub-titled “A Critique of the Bolton Thesis,” his book took as its point of departure the famous presidential address delivered by Herbert Eugene Bolton to the American Historical Association in 1932 on “The Epic of Greater America,” an address that had been the object of O’Gorman’s scorn in his Hegel essay.⁷

I am bound to say that, sixty years on, Bolton’s lecture reads, to me at least, rather disappointingly. Making use, as he himself says, of “a few bold strokes,”⁸ he surveys in largely narrative form some four hundred years of the history of the Western Hemisphere, delivering along the way a series of comments that are sometimes shrewd and sometimes idiosyncratic, as when he observes that “on

6. *Ibid.*, p. 103, footnote.

7. First published in *The American Historical Review*, 38 (1933). Republished in Herbert E. Bolton, *Wider Horizons of American History* (New York, 1939; repr. Notre Dame, 1967), pp. 1–54, and in Hanke, *Do the Americas . . . ?*, as Document 3. For bibliographical details of the Hanke volume, see above, note 5.

8. Bolton, *Wider Horizons*, p. 3.

the mainland Spaniards first settled among the advanced peoples—Mayas, Aztecs, Pueblos, Chibchas, and Incas. These natives were easiest to conquer, were most worth exploiting, and their women made the best cooks.”⁹ The culinary skills of the conquered are not usually included among the justifications for conquest.¹⁰ But if the panorama that he unfolds before us is more bold than subtle, at least nobody in Bolton’s audience could fail to get the message. And the message was both important and timely.

Bolton’s intention was to launch a grand assault on the traditions of historical writing and teaching in the United States. His principal charge against his fellow-historians was that, by treating the history of the thirteen colonies and the United States in isolation, they had raised up “a nation of chauvinists.”¹¹ Instead, they should realize that the broad phases of the history of the United States and of the colonial territories that preceded it are but “phases common to most portions of the entire Western Hemisphere; that each local story will have clearer meaning when studied in the light of the others; and that much of what has been written of each national history is but a thread out of a larger strand.”¹² In place of the *Epic of*

9. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

10. But for the potentially wide implications of the theme of conquest and diet, see John C. Super, *Food, Conquest, and Colonization in Sixteenth-Century Spanish America* (Albuquerque, 1988). According to one of Bolton’s former students, Dr. Maury A. Bromsen, who was present at my lecture, the remark represents Bolton in jocular mode. 11. *Ibid.*, p. 2. 12. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

America, in which “America” was taken to mean the United States, a new synthesis was needed to embrace the “significant developments of the Western Hemisphere as a whole”—a synthesis that would be an authentic “Epic of *Greater America*.¹³

Bolton’s message, as Lewis Hanke points out, fell largely on deaf ears, and even Bolton’s own students did little to advance their master’s cause. Subsequently, pan-American initiatives gave rise to sporadic discussion of his theory of a Greater America, some of it anthologized in Hanke’s volume. But historical trends were running, if anything, in the opposite direction. As the doctoral theses proliferated and the monographs multiplied, there came a moment when the community of historians looked as if it were set to dissolve the hard-won Union of the thirteen colonies. A growing parochialism left the chronicler of colonial Virginia barely within hailing distance of the New England specialist, and consigned the Middle Colonies to a middle that had no outer edges. Yet while the fragmentation continued apace, and individual colonies themselves splintered into a multiplicity of local communities, national history continued to reign supreme at the macrocosmic level, and with it the doctrine of American exceptionalism.¹⁴ Simultaneously, and in a welcome development, the history of Latin America was gaining

13. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

14. See Daniel W. Howe, *American History in an Atlantic Context* (Inaugural Lecture, Oxford, 1993), and Michael Kammen, “The Problem of American Exceptionalism,” *American Quarterly*, 45 (1993), pp. 1–43.

an increasing number of adherents in United States universities. But the effect of their researches was, if anything, to widen still further the gap between the two Americas, with the result that prospects for the epic of Greater America appeared no more promising than in Bolton's days.

But over the past few years the signs have been multiplying of a significant change of historical direction. In the first place, in the wake of the Vietnam War historians have subjected the idea of American exceptionalism to mounting attack.¹⁵ A growing awareness that the historical experience of the United States is not in all respects either unique, or uniquely blessed, and that it shares problems common to other parts of the world, has encouraged a new willingness to contemplate United States history in a wider context. This awareness comes at a time when historians internationally have been paying increasing attention to the opportunities presented by comparative history.¹⁶ It is significant, and highly encouraging, that the John Carter Brown Library has been among the first to appreciate these opportunities and has responded by setting up its Center for New World Comparative Studies. The brochure for this Center rightly observes that "the history of the European conquest of the Americas offers unusual opportunities for comparative study, since it is a history that for the entire hem-

15. See Kammen, "The Problem of American Exceptionalism."

16. See my Inaugural Lecture at Oxford University, *National and Comparative History* (Oxford, 1991).

isphere begins *de novo*, creating a gigantic laboratory for the investigation of human interaction and social, political, economic, and cultural development.”¹⁷

As we salute this exciting new enterprise, it is only fair to remember that, in at least some areas of the study of the Americas, a well-established historical tradition has long sought to transcend national boundaries and think in hemispheric terms. One such area is the history of slavery, with the publication in 1946 of Frank Tanenbaum’s *Slave and Citizen: the Negro in the Americas* providing a stimulus and point of departure. Another is the history of the frontier, in spite of the resolutely North American and isolationist character of Turner’s original frontier thesis. It is significant that Herbert Bolton, in a seminar which he gave in Mexico City in 1946, urged his audience to consider the applicability of the Turner thesis to the history of Mexico. But while Bolton himself did so much for the history of the borderlands, he displayed more interest in the impact of Spaniards on the frontier region than in a Turner-style exploration of the impact of the frontier region on the Spaniards.¹⁸ Recently, though, David

17. John Carter Brown Library brochure, *The Center for New World Comparative Studies at the John Carter Brown Library*.

18. See David J. Weber, “Turner, the Boltonians, and the Borderlands,” *American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), pp. 66–81. Frederick Jackson Turner’s famous paper “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” first presented in 1893, argued that the continuous existence of a western frontier, until nearly the end of the nineteenth century, had had a formative influence on the development of American democracy.

Weber has pursued paths which Bolton chose not to tread. His *The Spanish Frontier in North America*¹⁹ is at once a trans-national and trans-ethnic study, a genuine Greater American epic of the borderlands.

There are other themes, too, which historians have recently begun to address in ways that subvert or transcend the old national distinctions. As the age of European imperialism recedes into the past, new attention is being paid to the theory and practice of empire, often from a comparative standpoint. Patricia Seed has compared *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492–1640*;²⁰ Anthony Pagden, in his *Lords of All the World*, has compared Spanish, French and British ideologies of empire;²¹ and I am currently engaged on a large-scale comparison of Britain and Spain in colonial America, of which a foretaste appeared in a published lecture comparing their respective approaches to the indigenous population.²²

Immigration, too, is another transcendental theme

19. (New Haven and London, 1992).

20. (Cambridge, 1995).

21. (New Haven and London, 1995).

22. *Britain and Spain in America: Colonists and Colonized* (The Stenton Lecture, The University of Reading, 1994). See also my “Empire and State in British America,” on which I have drawn for this lecture. This essay is one of several in a volume of 1992 conference papers organized by CERMACA and directed towards pan-American comparisons, *Le Nouveau Monde—Mondes Nouveaux. L’expérience américaine*, ed. Serge Gruzinski and Nathan Wachtel (Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations. Editions de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 1996).

which has recently aroused enormous interest, partly as a result of the publication in 1986 of Bernard Bailyn's *Voyagers to the West*.²³ In the nature of the subject, the peopling of America, whether by Europeans or Africans, cannot be contained within narrow geographical bounds. One problem that it immediately presents is that of the Caribbean. As the temporary or permanent destination of so many voluntary and involuntary migrants, the West Indies—neither North, South nor Central America—can hardly be left out of account in histories of the settlement of the American mainland. Karen Kupperman's recent analysis of the English enterprise in the 1630s for the colonization of Providence Island (which is off the coast of Nicaragua) has highlighted the artificiality of any such attempt at compartmentalization, at least where immigration and settlement are concerned.²⁴

More than the West Indies, however, are at stake. Emigration cries out for comparative study, and recent collections of essays on the various European transatlantic migratory movements are beginning to make this feasible.²⁵ But, by demanding a knowledge of the societies in which the emigrants originated, as well as of those to which they went, the study of European emigration to the

23. (New York, 1986).

24. Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Providence Island, 1630–1641* (Cambridge, 1993).

25. Ida Altman and James Horn, eds., "To Make America," *European Emigration in the Early Modern Period* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford 1991); Nicholas Canny, ed., *Europeans on the Move. Studies on European Migration, 1500–1800* (Oxford, 1994).

New World is also proving to be an important driving-force behind one of the most important new historiographical developments of recent years. This is the turn to Atlantic History, whose rising fortunes have been chronicled by Bernard Bailyn in a recently published article.²⁶ The Atlantic, once seen as a great divide, is increasingly being seen again as a waterway, linking two halves of a single world. Like the captains of the ships which carried the emigrants and the merchandise, historians now weave to and fro between its eastern and western shores. Once the Atlantic world as a whole comes to be accepted as a viable unit of study—and the brilliant first volume of D. W. Meinig's *The Shaping of America* shows how rich the rewards can be²⁷—the old compartments of national history appear increasingly inadequate, and we find ourselves on the brink of a radical new assessment of the American past.

In this new historical world of comparison and Atlanticization, the question “Do the Americas have a common history?” deserves to be asked again. Because of the changes in our approach to the past, the answer is unlikely to be framed in terms that would have been used by historians of Bolton's generation. But let us begin for a moment by transposing the terms of the question, and asking “Does *Europe* have a common history?” The answer, I think it would generally be agreed, is that it

26. Bernard Bailyn, “The Idea of Atlantic History,” *Itinerario*, 20 (1996), pp. 1–27.

27. D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America*, vol. 1, *Atlantic America, 1492–1800* (New Haven and London, 1986).

does. When we say this, I think that we mean two things. First, we mean that Europe is a distinctive historical entity, in the sense that, although it is a composite of peoples of very different origin, it has developed a civilization which can be clearly differentiated from the civilizations, say, of China or Islam. Secondly, its component parts, although differing widely in character, have enough shared experiences and features in common for the elements of unity to outweigh the elements of diversity.

With this European comparison in mind, let us turn to the question of the existence, or non-existence, of a Greater America. Although the original inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere developed forms of social organization with certain common features—a diet based on maize, for instance, or shamanistic forms of religion—I do not think that one can make any meaningful claim for their possessing a common history before the coming of the Europeans. The societies they evolved were too fragmented, too isolated from each other, too linguistically divided to suggest any underlying unity. It is symptomatic, for instance, that the Aztec and Inca empires seem to have lived in almost total ignorance of each other—Atahualpa knew nothing of the fate of Montezuma, and was in no position to take preventive measures before Pizarro appeared.

It was the Europeans who endowed these peoples with their first, specious, unity, by labelling them indiscriminately with the brand-name of Indian. It was the Europeans, too, as Edmundo O'Gorman took pleasure in

reminding us many years ago, who “invented” America.²⁸ They invented it as a name, they invented it as a concept, and finally they invented it as a historical entity. Although the name appeared, by courtesy of Martin Waldseemüller, as early as 1507, it took the best part of three centuries for it to gain universal recognition. For the Spaniards until well into the eighteenth century, it remained *las Indias*. But already by the later seventeenth century, “America,” long established as the name of a continent, was beginning to give *las Indias* a run for its money, as we can see from the title of a recently published Spanish manuscript written in 1683 by the Marquis of Varinas, *The Ecclesiastical, Political and Military State of America (or Greatness of the Indies)*.²⁹

The name, however, whether “America,” “the Indies,” or simply “the New World,” was of less moment than the concept it embodied. This was the concept of a vast fourth part of the world, its existence and inhabitants hitherto unknown to Europeans, now taking its place in what they had previously assumed to be the tripartite world of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Onto this world, abundant in land and, it was believed, inexhaustibly rich in precious metals, generations of Europeans projected their hopes, aspirations, and dreams. Booty and vassals for conquerors; land, livelihood, and “competency” (to

28. Edmundo O’Gorman, *The Invention of America* (Bloomington, 1961).

29. Gabriel Fernández de Villalobos (Marqués de Varinas), *Estado eclesiástico, político y militar de América (o grandeza de Indias)*, ed. Javier Falcón Ramírez (Madrid, 1990).

use the seventeenth-century New England expression)³⁰ for settlers; profits for merchants; converts for missionaries; and a refuge for the persecuted—America, at least in prospect, seemed to offer all of these. All across Europe the message received from these remote regions was the same. “The land is good . . . and, when all is said and done, people get to eat better than in Spain,” wrote a priest in Mexico to his brother in Spain in 1572.³¹ His words were echoed by an early settler of Pennsylvania: “It is a great deal better living here than in England, for working people, poor working people, doth live as well here, as landed men doth live with you.”³²

These European settlers were creating America, an America which can be regarded historically as an extension of Europe, in a way that Asia and Africa could never be. This was a continent imagined, invaded, occupied, and developed—or exploited—by Europe; and for all the other elements—indigenous, African, and more recently Asian—which have gone into its making, that original European imprint has been so strong and all-pervasive as to mark it for all time. In this sense, the hemisphere possesses a common history, but one that, by its nature, makes it less historically distinctive than that of the other

30. See Daniel Vickers, “Competency and Competition: Economic Culture in Early America,” *WMQ*, 47 (1990), pp. 3–29.

31. Enrique Otte, *Cartas privadas de emigrantes a Indias, 1540–1616* (Seville, n.d.), letter 207.

32. Quoted by David W. Galenson, “The Settlement and Growth of the Colonies,” *The Cambridge Economic History of the United States*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1996), p. 138.

continents, since, however much it may wish to do so, it can never fully throw off the influence of its non-American origins.

But this hardly dispels the central problem that underlies the question “Do the Americas have a common history?”. This is the problem of the unity, or diversity, of its historical experience. On the one hand, it could be argued that, while America can be described historically as an offshoot of Europe, the Europe that transferred itself to the New World was so diverse that any general characteristics that it conferred on the new continent are of much less significance than the national forms in which those characteristics were replicated. David Hume recognized the tenacity of these national characteristics when he wrote that “the same set of manners will follow a nation, and adhere to them over the whole globe, as well as the same laws and language. The Spanish, English, French and Dutch colonies, are all distinguishable even between the tropics.”³³ British America, Spanish America, Portuguese America, French America—are not these, even today, recognizably distinctive Americas, whose very different patterns of social and cultural development make it impossible to claim that the Americas in any meaningful sense share a common history?

Against this argument of an essential diversity, which might be summarized as the “national character thesis,” there is a counter-argument posited on the transcending and unifying influence of America itself. According to

33. David Hume, “Of National Characters,” *Essays: Moral, Political and Literary* (Oxford, 1963), p. 210.

this counter-argument, or “the Americanization thesis,” the diversity of the Europeans who settled the New World melts into insignificance beside the realities of the America which they found on their arrival. This is the thesis implicit in Turner’s theory of the Frontier, even if he confines himself to North America. The American environment, with its abundance of land, created over time a new, and distinctively American, people, whose shared characteristics came to blur, and ultimately cancel out, the diversity of their origins.

My own view is that there can be no clear-cut and decisive conclusion in this debate over nature versus nurture. But the very fact that the debate is incapable of resolution points up the complexity of the history of the Americas, and suggests why the question “Do the Americas have a common history?” is less easy to settle, one way or the other, than may appear at first sight. In order to test the question, and the possible answers, I want to take three major themes, confining myself largely to the colonial period of American history, the period to which the John Carter Brown Library essentially confines itself. These themes are settlement, government, and independence; and in treating them I shall be forced to limit myself, like Bolton before me, to “some few bold strokes.”

Let us begin with settlement. Between the late fifteenth and the late eighteenth century it has been estimated that some 1,500,000 Europeans emigrated to the Caribbean Islands and mainland America,³⁴ (to keep this

34. See the table in Altman and Horn, “*To Make America*,” p. 3.

great European migration in perspective, it should be added that over the same period more than seven million African slaves made the same crossing).³⁵ Of the Europeans, perhaps 700,000 were British and half a million Spanish. Among the remainder there were 100,000 Portuguese, and 50,000 French. Between them these four nations created, as David Hume indicated, four very different colonial worlds.

If we try to summarize very briefly the salient characteristics of these four colonial worlds, as conventionally depicted, I think it would be generally agreed that Spanish America, easily the vastest in extent, was an essentially urban-based civilization, with a settler elite at the apex of a hierarchical society and a large indigenous labour force forming its base, while its economic life was dominated by the silver production of the two great viceroyalties of Mexico and Peru. The British colonial world, by contrast, was more rural than urban, but it was a rural world of considerable variety, ranging from the small farms of New England and the Middle Colonies to the plantation societies of the West Indies and the South, heavily dependent on African slave labour. Its indigenous population was small and thinly settled in comparison with that of Spanish America, and the contribution of this indigenous population to the economic life of the colonies was relatively insignificant. Portuguese Brazil, with a relatively small white population, was saved and consol-

35. Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1973), p. 135.

idated by the development of a sugar plantation economy worked by black slaves. While the same was true of the French West Indian settlements, those along the St. Lawrence were essentially settlements of fur traders, farmers, and missionaries.

What, it may fairly be asked, did these four Americas (or five, if we include the few and scattered Dutch settlements) have in common? Not, at first sight, very much. They were settled at different times—a whole century, after all, separates the establishment of the Spaniards in the Caribbean from the founding of Jamestown—and in many respects they faithfully reflect the cultural assumptions and social aspirations of those who populated them at the moment of first settlement.

Thirty years ago, Louis Hartz depicted the new overseas societies as “fragments of the larger whole of Europe struck off in the course of the revolution which brought the west into the modern world.” These societies evinced what he called “the immobilities of fragmentation,” and were programmed for eternity not only by the place but the time of their origin. Thus Iberian America and French Canada were, and remained, feudal in spirit, while British and Dutch America were the products of the evolving capitalist and liberal metropolitan societies from which they sprang.³⁶

There is a certain superficial attractiveness about Hartz’s interpretation. Cortés and his fellow-conquis-

36. Louis Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies* (New York, 1964), ch. 1.

tadors went to the New World with visions of becoming great lords of vassals, like those whom they had seen and envied in Spain. Some of them, at least, realized their ambition, and, as *encomenderos*, created in Mexico and Peru a passable approximation of the seigneurial society they knew at home. Similarly, the New England settlers of the Great Migration established overseas societies which reflected with reasonable faithfulness the cultural assumptions and the patterns of social and economic behaviour of the communities from which they came—small market towns and villages, with strong communal values, but also fostering a rugged sense of individual independence born of a world-view in which hard work, earthly success, and divine favour were linked together in a unique relationship.

Yet these generalized images hardly stand up to closer scrutiny. Those gentlemen settlers of Jamestown, whose idleness drove the Virginia Company to despair, seem to be quite as seigneurial in their attitudes as the conventional conquistador. Similarly, it is not hard to find entrepreneurial aspirations and commercial acumen in the conquistador societies of Spanish America, starting with Cortés himself, with his sugar plantations and his ambitious trading ventures.³⁷ In Early Modern England and the Iberian Peninsula alike, the work ethic and the idleness culture existed side by side, and both together made the Atlantic crossing.

37. France V. Scholes, "The Spanish Conqueror as a Business Man: a Chapter in the History of Fernando Cortés," *New Mexico Quarterly*, 28 (1958), pp. 5-29.

I believe, therefore, that Hartz's assumption of a diverse America based on "immobilities of fragmentation" is much too simplistic. I believe, too, that to get a more balanced picture we must also take into account the America, or Americas, in which these fragments of metropolitan European societies established themselves. Every European who crossed the Atlantic was immediately faced with the shock of the new. "Everything," Tomás de Mercado warned his Spanish compatriots, "is very different."³⁸ The crossing of the ocean and the need to adapt to this new and different environment were the two common bonds uniting all the Europeans who moved to America, and endowed them with at least the beginnings of a common history.

But this said, we are once again faced with the question of diversity. There was not one American environment but many, from the tropical islands of the Caribbean to the high mountain ranges of the Andes and the wooded landscapes of New England. In each instance, Europeans were faced with the challenge of adaptation and of introducing "changes in the land."³⁹ They set about this gigantic task in a variety of ways, determined both by their cultural conditioning and by the systems of colonization that they adopted—company colonization, for instance, imposed different requirements from those

38. Cited in J. H. Elliott, *The Old World and the New, 1492–1650* (Cambridge, 1970, repr. 1992), p. 21.

39. See William Cronon, *Changes in the Land* (New York, 1983).

arising from colonization under strict supervision by the crown. But, amidst all the varieties of environment which confronted the first generations of European settlers, two local elements, I believe, were determinative of the way in which they would shape their societies. One was the presence, or absence, of large and settled concentrations of Indians. The other was the presence, or absence, of gold and silver.

It was the combination of lands densely settled by indigenous populations and the discovery of rich silver deposits, that gave Mexico and Peru, and with them the Hispanic American world as a whole, the particular social and economic configuration it was to assume. A large and easily exploitable supply of native labour sharply cut down on the need for immigrants from metropolitan Spain, and provided the work-force required for the development of mining economies. These would allow the settlers and their descendants to live lives of relative affluence, in conditions approximating those of the hierarchical and seigneurial world they had known at home. Although there were important entrepreneurial opportunities in these Hispanic overseas societies, and they were eagerly taken, the conditions of life tended towards the reinforcement of the social attitudes and values of the upper stratum of the metropolitan society from which they came.

Many of the first emigrants to British America were bitterly disappointed to find that, unlike the Spaniards, the new lands to which they had come contained neither gold nor silver, nor usable Indians. Lacking these re-

sources, they were forced to find alternative ways of making a living from the land. Without a reliable native work-force, they were dependent on a steady supply of immigrants, either in the form of indentured servants, or, increasingly, of African slaves in those regions where it was possible to develop a staple crop with lucrative overseas markets. We find, therefore, the gradual development not of one British America, but two—one in New England and the Middle Colonies, of farmsteads worked by settler families, often making use of indentured white labour, and the other in the West Indies and the Chesapeake region, of plantations worked by slaves. The conditions of life in these two British Americas tended to foster coexisting and often contrasting characteristics imported from the home society—on the one hand, for instance, an honour culture, and on the other the culture of the work ethic. But what, it is tempting to ask, would have happened to the culture of the work ethic if there had been densely settled populations of Indians in Massachusetts and rich silver deposits had been discovered in Roger Williams's Rhode Island?

It could therefore be argued that, as far as settlement of the land is concerned, national characteristics are less significant than the nature of the local environment. In some respects, the Chesapeake colonies had more in common with Portuguese Brazil and with the West Indian Islands—Spanish, French and English—than they had with the British colonies to the north. All were plantation societies in which relatively small white elites, living off the profits that came from exporting a staple product to distant over-

seas markets, dominated a large subservient population of a different colour from themselves. In this sense, it is possible to speak of different Americas with different common histories, but with the differences shaped less by national character than by environmental conditions.

Yet if we turn from the settlement of the land to the government and the political culture of the societies established in the Americas, diversity based on national origins once again becomes the order of the day. Here I would suggest that two defining characteristics worked to create two very different Americas. The first of these was the presence or absence of representative assemblies, and the second was the presence or absence of a diversity of religions.

The colonial societies of British America, as we all know, were societies based on the idea of political consent institutionalized through representative institutions modelled on those of the mother country. While Anglo-Americans may congratulate themselves on this, I do not think that we can necessarily take it to indicate some intrinsically superior national virtue. There was nothing inevitable about the transfer of English parliamentary forms to the New World, although I believe that there were certain predisposing tendencies in this direction which were reinforced by the circumstances of colonization. Since this first occurred under company auspices rather than royal direction, and the Virginia Company had to offer attractive conditions in order to lure potential settlers, it was natural to offer them the same “liberties, franchises and immunities” as those they enjoyed in

England.⁴⁰ No such guarantees were given, or needed to be given, to French or Iberian settlers by their respective monarchs.

A combination of convenience, custom, and concession led to the establishment of popular assemblies to ensure the preservation of these “liberties, franchises and immunities.” While the process was not inevitable, the establishment of different colonial settlements in different parts of British America made it difficult to prevent the spread of representative institutions once they had been introduced into Virginia and Bermuda. The colonies were competing against each other for immigrants, and, as the Duke of York found to his discomfiture in his proprietary colony of New York, immigrants from Britain came to expect that the colonial settlement to which they had travelled in search of a better life would contain an assembly in which they would have some sort of voice. If it did not, they would simply move elsewhere.

In Iberian and French colonial America, by contrast, such assemblies failed to take root. Although the different realms of the Iberian peninsula all had their representative assemblies at the time of colonization, Ferdinand and Isabella were determined to keep them out of the New World, and the Spanish crown in the sixteenth century was strong enough to maintain this policy, in spite of one or two attempts by the settlers to organize such bodies. This does not mean to say that consent was absent in the

40. Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History. The Settlements*, 1 (New Haven, 1934), p. 86 (citing Sir John Popham).

Iberian New World. It had, however, to seek alternative forms of expression in societies in which the power of the crown was much more deeply entrenched and far more all-pervasive than it was in the British colonial world.⁴¹

In Iberian, and later in French, America, colonization brought with it a bureaucratic structure of a kind which the British crown never established, and only fitfully attempted to establish, in the British colonies. This structure was at its most elaborate in Spanish America, with its viceroys, its judicial tribunals or *audiencias*, and its cohorts of local officials. Because of the vast extent of the territories to be governed, and the tacit or open resistance of the settler elites when unpopular new measures were introduced, the structure of the imperial state was neither as all-embracing nor as omnicompetent in practice as it was in intention. But it remains true that the imperial state was a real presence in Iberian America in a way that it was not in British America, where, for most of the colonial period, the colonists tended to regulate their lives by laws drafted and approved by themselves.

In this sense the British colonies were more open societies than the Iberian colonies to the south, and this openness was enhanced by the diversity of their religious life. In Iberian and French America the church-state relationship was strong and very close, in spite of inevi-

41. Woodrow Borah, "The New World" in "Representative Institutions in the Spanish Empire in the Sixteenth Century," *The Americas*, 12 (1956), pp. 246-57; Guillermo Lohmann Villena, "Las cortes en Indias," *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español*, 15 (1947), pp. 655-62.

table moments of tension. In British America, as in seventeenth-century Dutch America, where the Reformed Church attempted but failed to maintain conformity to its doctrines and practices,⁴² the inter-colonial competition for immigrants gave an extra impetus to the tendencies to fragmentation that were always inherent in Protestantism. Nor did the Anglican church, even in Virginia, possess the clerical establishment to impose and maintain uniformity on colonial populations. This was, after all, a church without a single bishop in the New World throughout the entire colonial period. By contrast, there were forty-two dioceses⁴³ and a vast clerical establishment in Spanish America by the end of the eighteenth century. It is true that the monolithic character of the Roman Catholic church in the Americas can easily be exaggerated. There were, after all, sharp doctrinal disagreements and intense rivalries between the religious orders, and the forms of religion and worship being adopted by the subjugated indigenous populations were to produce some innovative deviations from Catholic orthodoxy. But the fact remains that Protestant America, with its increasingly rich diversity of creeds, and its acceptance, however grudging at times, of the necessity for peaceful coexistence and religious toleration, presented a striking contrast to a Roman Catholic America, in which a high degree of religious conformity was main-

42. See Oliver A. Rink, *Holland on the Hudson* (Ithaca and London, 1986), pp. 228–37.

43. *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, ed. Leslie Bethell, I (Cambridge, 1984), p. 518.

tained by a massive ecclesiastical apparatus and a close and continuous alliance between church and state.

Do the Americas, then—these contrasting colonial Americas of, on the one hand, politically open and religiously diverse societies, and, on the other of religiously closed and politically centralized societies with a heavy bureaucratic apparatus—really have any claim to share a common history? On the surface at least, the disparities seem simply too great. But let us look at the story of the achievement of independence to determine the relative balance of similarity and dissimilarity in their trajectories.

British America secured its independence from the mother country in the 1770s; Spanish and Portuguese America followed suit in the 1810s and 1820s. The time-lag is important, because the achievement of independence by British America created a working model which encouraged Iberian America to think what might otherwise have been unthinkable, and envisage its own emancipation. During this period, too, new connections, cultural and commercial, were beginning to break down the traditional barriers between the two Americas, and to foster hopes that, even if they did not share a common past, at least they shared a common destiny.

Yet for all the contribution of North American influence to the political emancipation of Central and Southern America, it is possible, in spite of the large disparities I have described, to detect many of the same processes at work throughout the hemisphere during the course of the eighteenth century. At first sight, if we take our stand in

the opening decades of the century, nothing could be more different than the laissez-faire world of the British colonies, and the centralized imperial systems which regulated the lives of the inhabitants of Spanish and Portuguese America. But appearances can be deceptive.

The seventeenth century had seen a drastic weakening of Spanish power in Europe, and this inevitably had important repercussions in its American possessions. An impoverished Spanish crown was driven into making important concessions to the creole (i.e., American-born) elites, particularly in relation to the ownership of land, and began selling off to the highest creole bidders judicial and administrative offices which would normally have been filled by officials from Spain. At moments during the first half of the eighteenth century as many as 60 percent of the posts in the American *audiencias* were filled by creoles.⁴⁴ The effect of this weakening of royal control was that by the mid-eighteenth century, powerful oligarchies were firmly entrenched throughout Spain's American colonies, which in practice had achieved a substantial degree of self-rule. Like the British-American colonies, the Spanish-American viceroyalties were becoming creole states.

The "salutary neglect"⁴⁵ which characterized Lon-

44. See Guillermo Céspedes del Castillo, *América hispánica, 1492–1898* (Barcelona, 1983), p. 302; Mark A. Burkholder and D. S. Chandler, *From Impotence to Authority. The Spanish Crown and the American Audiencias, 1687–1808* (New York, 1977).

45. See James Henretta, "Salutary Neglect." *Colonial Administration under the Duke of Newcastle* (Princeton, 1972).

don's relationship to Britain's American colonies during long stretches of the early eighteenth century, therefore, was not limited to the British colonial world. A Hispanic version of the same phenomenon prevailed to the south. But neither in the British-American nor the Hispanic-American worlds was salutary neglect to become a permanent way of life. Too many transatlantic links had been forged, and too many vested interests were at stake. For both empires the 1760s were to be the critical decade, and, in both, the precipitants of change were the same—the demands of war and the claims of rational administration.

For both a victorious England and a defeated Spain the experiences of the Seven Years' War of 1756–63 brought home the need for a major redefinition of the imperial relationship. Spain's loss of Havana and Manila in 1762 forced upon Madrid a thorough review of its defence strategy, which in turn raised the whole question of the actual and potential value to the metropolis of its American possessions.⁴⁶ England's victories, for their part, brought with them vast new territorial responsibilities, and therefore posed in no less acute a form than in Spain the problems of how to secure a more effective colonial contribution to the costs of administration and defense. In devising their answers to these problems, the imperial administrators—a Halifax in England, a José de Gálvez in Spain—were inspired by the spirit of an Enlighten-

46. Christian I. Archer, *The Army in Bourbon Mexico, 1760–1810* (Albuquerque, 1977), pp. 9–10; David Brading, "Bourbon Spain and its American Empire" *Cambridge History of Latin America*, 1, pp. 399–400.

ment imbued with the ideals of rationality and cost-effectiveness.⁴⁷

The attempts at administrative and fiscal reform resulting from this reassessment of imperial relationships by both London and Madrid provoked indignation and outrage in British and Spanish America alike. Societies which had for a long time been left very much to their own devices were taken aback by the brusqueness of the measures taken by imperial governments to reassert a long-distance authority over American affairs. For more than a century the creole societies of Spanish America had been societies engaged in at least a subconscious search for a distinctive sense of identity; and, as Madrid began to emphasize the subordinate nature of their relationship by referring to them disparagingly as “colonies” instead of “the kingdoms of the Indies,” so they responded by emphasizing the essentially “American” character of that identity.⁴⁸ In the British colonies, the attempts of the Crown in Parliament to assert its authority precipitated a similar process. A people who until recently had been

47. For the new “rationality” in the English approach, see John Shy, “Thomas Pownall, Henry Ellis, and the Spectrum of Possibilities, 1763–1775,” in his *A People Numerous and Armed* (revised ed., Ann Arbor, 1990), pp. 77–78; in the Spanish, Guillermo Céspedes del Castillo, “Los reinos de Indias,” in *Carlos III y la Ilustración* (Exhibition catalogue, Madrid, 1988), i, pp. 389–400.

48. See Anthony Pagden, “Identity Formation in Spanish America,” in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden, eds., *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800* (Princeton, 1987), ch. 3.

taking pride in insisting on their British heritage,⁴⁹ now slowly and haltingly began to think of themselves as “Americans.”

In both the British and the Hispanic worlds the confrontation between the imperial government and well-entrenched and increasingly self-conscious local elites produced disruption, upheaval, and revolt—1776 in the British colonies, 1781 in New Granada with the revolt of the Comuneros, followed a generation later by the uprisings that would bring independence to the viceroyalties of Mexico and Peru and most of the Spanish-American colonial world. If the break with the mother country was slower in coming in Iberian than British America, this was in large part because the Hispanic state structure was capacious enough to absorb and contain provincial revolt. It was only when the state itself collapsed as a result of Napoleon’s invasion of Spain that the sudden vacuum at the centre left Spain’s colonies without their traditional point of reference.

There are, then, significant differences in the ways in which British and Iberian America achieved their independence, just as there would also be profound differences in the new kinds of political configurations which would arise from the ruins of the old. The creation of a single United States of America contrasts sharply with the splintering of Spanish America into seventeen sovereign

49. Michael Zuckerman, “Identity in British America: Unease in Eden,” in Canny and Pagden, *Colonial Identity*, ch. 5; Jack P. Greene, *Peripheries and Center* (Athens, Georgia, and London, 1986), pp. 166–67.

nations, although it should not be forgotten that there was splintering too in the British Atlantic world, as the West Indies and Canada opted to remain within the imperial state. But for all the differences, which deserve the analysis and explanation that only comparative history can provide, I hope that in this very schematic sketch of the coming of independence, I have managed to suggest that similar underlying trends were at work over a large part of the Americas, and that, here at least, we can genuinely speak of the Americas as having a common history.

I would hope, too, that I have given some indication of how such a common history might be written. An “Epic of Greater America,” if it is to be convincing, must, in my view, not attempt to conceal the great differences, both of structure and trajectory, between the different component parts of that America. But at the same time it can, and should, seek to show how certain common processes have been at work—the processes involved in the challenge of coming to terms with new lands and new peoples; the challenge of establishing new societies which were, and yet were not, replicas of those which the settlers had left behind in Europe; the challenge of establishing a distinctive sense of identity and of cutting the umbilical cords that bound them to their mother countries. Inevitably, because of the different times and place of origin, and because of their different cultural heritages, they responded to these challenges in a variety of ways. But there was enough similarity in their responses to provide the material for a common history.

That common history, however, at least as far as the

colonial period is concerned, cannot and should not be divorced from its wider, Atlantic, context. The inter-relation between Europe and America was constant, and throughout the colonial period Europe remained the standard point of reference for these new American societies. The common history of the Americas was, for three centuries at least, the common history also of the whole Atlantic world.

But what of the period since the coming of independence? Bolton had no difficulty in identifying a new set of common themes—"national growth and unification,"⁵⁰ mass immigration, and the intensive development of the natural resources of the hemisphere. Yet if, as I believe, we can see the eighteenth century as a century of convergence in the history of the Americas, I also believe that the succeeding century witnessed a new, and sharpening, divergence. In the 1760s and 1770s it would have been by no means clear to an impartial observer that the future—or at least the immediate future—lay with North America rather than with the southern half of the hemisphere. As Adam Smith recognized, the great cities of the Hispanic American world—Mexico City, Quito, Lima—easily outclassed in size "the three greatest cities of the English colonies," Boston, New York and Philadelphia.⁵¹ They also outclassed them in splendour. Although he considered the Spanish colonies to be less populous and

50. "The Epic of Greater America," p. 41.

51. *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (2 vols., London, 1961), 2, p. 79.

thriving than those of “almost any other European nation” in the New World, he also admitted that progress, in “population and improvement,” had been “very rapid and very great.”⁵² Humboldt, who began his great tour of the Spanish colonial world in 1799, gives a clear impression of prosperity and industrial growth, especially in the wake of the liberalization of the laws on overseas trade in 1778.⁵³

Yet the achievements of Spanish American civilization at the end of the eighteenth century were not to be sustained. Political fragmentation, internecine conflicts, and corrupt and incompetent government by elites jockeying for power among themselves as they sought to fill the space formerly occupied by the apparatus of the imperial state, left the new Iberian republics of America ill-equipped to match the rapid economic development that was to be achieved in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the growing colossus to the North. A unified polity in the United States, and with it a unified market constantly expanding westwards as wave after wave of immigrants moved across the continent in search of new land, helped create the conditions for sustained industrial growth which were for so long to elude even the larger Iberian polities, like Mexico and Brazil.

There was, too, another element at work to sharpen the nineteenth-century disparities between the two

52. *Ibid.*

53. Alejandro de Humboldt, *Ensayo político sobre el reino de la Nueva España* (4 vols., Mexico City, 1941), 4, 11–12.

Americas. Humboldt had already remarked on it at the very beginning of the century. There was, he wrote, a general lack of what he called “sociability” in Spain’s American possessions. This lack of sociability arose from ethnic and caste divisions, accompanied, in Humboldt’s words, by a “monstrous inequality of rights and fortunes.” He contrasted this ethnically divided society of Ibero-America, torn by bitterness and rancour, with what he saw as the homogenous society of North America, where the westward advance of the settlers had led to the continuous displacement of the Indian population. “Thus,” he wrote, “the first elements of the nascent nation were men who were free and shared a common origin.”⁵⁴

These social differences between a southern hemisphere with densely settled indigenous populations who somehow had to be incorporated into the structure of civil society, and a northern hemisphere relatively thinly settled by native Americans who could be marginalized or driven to extinction, go back, of course, to the very beginnings of colonization. If anything, the disparities which this created widened during the course of the nineteenth century, in ways that had a multiplier effect. If modern economic historians are right in seeing the relatively equal distribution of wealth as a key to successful industrialization,⁵⁵ the social differences noted by

54. *Ensayo político*, 2, pp. 149–50.

55. As argued by Stanley L. Engerman and Kenneth L. Sokoloff in “Factor Endowments, Institutions, and Differential Paths of Growth among New World Economies: a View from Economic

Humboldt do much to explain the growing economic differences between the two Americas that would follow in their wake. Where the history of North America in the nineteenth century was characterized by the extraordinary growth of an industrial economy, which would allow the United States to become the dominant world power of the twentieth century, the counterpoint to this success story was what seemed to be the persistent inability of the Latin South to follow in its tracks. By the middle decades of our own century, the two Americas, whose histories had appeared to be converging in the years round 1800, seemed once again to be hemispheres apart.

But the story is not over yet, and at this very moment we can see it taking still another twist. Since at least the eighteenth century the history of the two Americas has been a history of connections, as well as of point and counterpoint. It is obviously in the borderlands that they share most intensely a common history, and the massive reclamation of the borderlands by a Spanish-speaking Indian and mestizo population will prove in retrospect to be one of the most significant long-term developments in the twentieth-century history of the Americas. Frontiers, once seen as definitive, are now revealed as permeable, and the mass movement of people carries all before it.

These people come from a part of the continent in which the process of cultural and ethnic blending, which began at the moment of conquest and settlement, has for

Historians of the United States," *Historical Paper* no. 66 (National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, Mass., 1994).

centuries been going on beneath the surface. While the process, which imposed great social and political strains, has even now not fully run its course, there are indications in the Iberian-American world of a new-found political and cultural confidence which holds signs of promise for the future. The migrants, in moving northwards, have joined a society which has traditionally prided itself on its successes in assimilating different ethnic groups, but has in recent times become uncomfortably aware of how many were excluded and of how much still remains to be achieved. As the old certitudes have come face to face with new ambiguities, the exceptionalist character of United States history becomes more difficult to sustain.

But if we see that history as in part at least a history of the Americas as a whole, then perhaps we can view the problems of today in a more balanced perspective. The last five hundred years of the history of the Americas have themselves been a unique history of the encounter, and co-existence, of three continents: America itself, with its indigenous inhabitants; Europe, which set out to make America over as an extension of itself; and Africa, whose human resources were forcibly mobilized by Europeans to assist them in their task. The peoples of all these continents had to shape their lives to the realities of the American environment, with its enormous geographical diversity and its vast territorial expanse. In wrestling with these realities they brought to bear their own cultural traditions—local, regional, and national—and they produced, in the process, a rich diversity of response. Simultaneously they were engaged, whether they knew it or

not, in the still vaster enterprise of creating a common society, which, while reflecting something of the inheritances of all three, was to be more than simply the sum of its parts. That America remains an America in the making, the still uncertain outcome of a common past.

SIR JOHN ELLIOTT

Sir John Huxtable Elliott was born in 1930 and educated at Eton College and Trinity College, Cambridge. He began his career at the University of Cambridge and in 1968 was made Professor of History at King's College at the University of London. In 1973, he was invited to serve on the permanent faculty of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, New Jersey, where he remained for seventeen years. In 1990 he accepted a call from his native country to assume the post of Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford University, a Royal appointment. Sir John is also a Fellow at Oriel College.

Sir John is widely recognized as the leading historian of early modern Spain and the Spanish Empire in the English-speaking world. Among his scholarly publications are: *The Revolt of the Catalans* (1963); *Imperial Spain* (1963); *Europe Divided 1559–1598* (1968); *The Old World and the New, 1492–1650* (1970); *The Count-Duke of Olivares: The Statesman in an Age of Decline* (1986); and *Spain and Its World, 1500–1700* (1989).

Recently knighted in England, Sir John Elliott has been the recipient of many honors in Spain, including the Prince of Asturias Prize in 1996. He is an honorary Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge (1991) as well as a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Philosophical Society. At a special Brown University Convocation in November 1996,

called on the occasion of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the John Carter Brown Library, Sir John was awarded an honorary degree by the University.

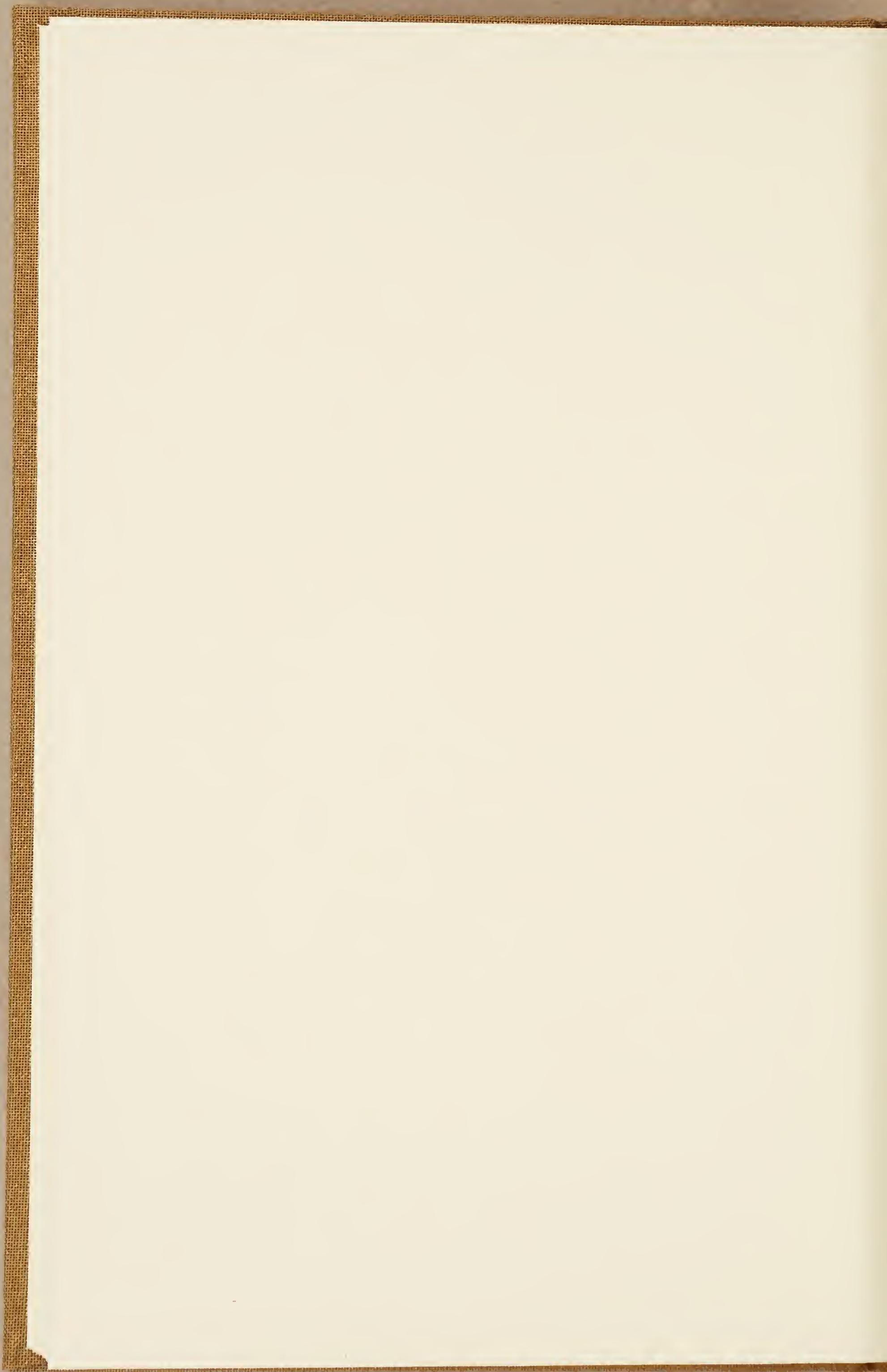
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